30/04/2020

World Council of Churches questions posed to His Most Godly Beatitude Patriarch Theophilus III of Jerusalem



His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III was interviewed by the World Council of Churches (WCC) director of communication Marianne Ejdersten. The interview follows below.

National, religious and ethnic borders are of no relevance to the COVID-19 virus. As we watch its effect on the entire world, we are reminded of the interconnectedness of the entire human family. In the next few weeks, Christians, Jews and Muslims will participate in central aspects of their ritual calendars; normally a time for festive gatherings, all are struggling to find a way to celebrate given the precautions we must take to protect ourselves, our loved ones and our communities. Christians, Jewish, and Muslim communities are responding to all the challenges of this unprecedented time: fighting hate and bigotry that has emerged because of the pandemic, providing frontline services to those in need, maintaining community, and seeking creative alternatives for observing and celebrating in a world of social distancing and quarantine.

In what ways is Your Beatitude seeing churches adapt to life amid the coronavirus outbreak? In the Holy Land, and worldwide.

In the long history of our Church, of course, the world has passed through countless difficulties. We are able to proceed with clarity by following the instructions of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who said, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17). In this way, particularly during our present situation dealing with the coronavirus, we maintain our prayer life as we should, but within the confines set by the authorities for the purpose of public health and safety.

How can we protect lives? What can we, as church/religious communities do?

Our Lord Jesus Christ summed up all the law and the prophets in two commandments: to love God with everything that we have, and to love our neighbour as ourselves, even our enemies. These commandments guide our Christian mission, and our Church has restated its commitment to philanthropic mission easing the burdens of others where necessary, both materially and morally. In this way, as servants of Christ and as spiritual leaders, we should engage ourselves into any acts of assistance that we can looking after the elderly and the vulnerable, and asking God’s mercy upon His creation and delivering us from this pandemic.

Your Beatitude, please share some of the liturgical work at the Easter celebrations in Jerusalem? How did you celebrate in the midst of COVID-19?

Since Jerusalem is the physical place of the human-divine encounter, our services

during Holy Week and Pascha were held not withstanding the difficult situation and the inability to welcome pilgrims and members of our local community to be physically present at the Holy Sepulchre, because of the necessary health guidelines. These services were streamed online and watched by hundreds of thousands here in the Holy Land and around the world.

Your Beatitudes' reflections on more than two-three million followers in social media for the Easter celebrations in Jerusalem?

As we confront this current crisis, it is clear that people around the world from all religious and even non-religious backgrounds prompted by a deep need to connect with the holy places. It's a consolation for them to know that there is hope that is embodied in our prayers for the whole world and for each one of us, and for relief from this virus. Likewise, people realize that without Heavenly protection life has no purpose and is uncertain. The hope of Resurrection that is Easter is in God's victory over evil powers and His never failing light over darkness is the pledge of eternal life with Him.

Your Beatitudes' strongest personal memory from the Easter in Jerusalem in 2020?

Our Easter celebration in Jerusalem might have been experienced in an unprecedented situation, but its purpose remains the same. God is not confined to local premises, for the human being is the church where the Holy Spirit dwells in him.

"for God's temple is holy and that temple you are" (1 Cor. 3:17)

In what ways can the Heads of Churches and religious leaders in Jerusalem be a role model in the midst of COVID-19?

Christian churches in the Holy City of Jerusalem and the Holy Land continue to be a living witness which is expressed in and through prayers on the very site of the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. As shepherds of Christ's flock, we continue our mission to keep the spirit alive and to spread the message of hope; for we are commanded:

"do not quench the spirit" (1 Th. 5:19)

And we are exhorted to encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, the needy and the sick in our society, and support each other through moments of uncertainty, fear and suffering. At the same time, as religious communities, we ask all people to

abide by the guidelines set forth by the authorities in order to keep each other safe and healthy.

As Your Beatitude confronts unprecedented challenges, what can the global fellowship pray for?

Let us thank our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ for His abiding love and for never abandoning us. We must pray for the manifestation of God's love in deeds and compassion to our fellow human brothers and sisters; for Saint John teaches us:

"If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that love not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" (1 John 4:20).

Questions prepared by the WCC director of communication Marianne Ejdersten.

Source